

The Gender Gap

Should girls and boys attend separate public schools?

Do boys and girls distract each other from learning? Some government officials seem to think so. Girls-only and boys-only schools are winning government support. The U.S. Department of Education recently announced that it is changing the regulations of **Title IX**, a law that **prohibits¹ gender discrimination²** in schools. The new rules make it easier for public schools to provide single-gender classrooms. In 1995, only three public schools offered gender-separate classes. Today [2007], that number has reached more than 240 and is expected to grow.

Advocates, or supporters, think that single-gender schools boost students' performance in class. "Research shows that some students may learn better in single-[gender] environments," says Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. Some studies show that boys and girls are more likely to participate in class when they know they won't be embarrassed in front of students of the opposite gender.

Two single-gender public schools in Chicago, Illinois, have been so popular that the city is planning to open more by 2010. "[All-girls and all-boys schools] can offer a learning environment with less peer pressure and more opportunities for leadership roles than other school settings," Arne Duncan, head of the Chicago public schools, told *WR News*. [2007]

Opponents³ of single-gender schools say separating boys and girls creates an **artificial**, or fake, learning environment. "It doesn't prepare boys and girls for the real world, where they will have to interact with and work alongside each other," says Kim Gandy, the president of the National Organization for Women. Some civil rights and women's organizations fear that the relaxed rules create an unequal and unfair learning environment.

Critics also argue that new regulations distract from other issues, such as more education funding and smaller class size. "When elements of good education are present, girls and boys succeed," says Lisa Maatz of the American Association of University Women.

¹ **prohibit:** forbid

² **gender discrimination:** unfair treating of students differently based on whether they are boys or girls

³ **opponents:** people fighting against something